

**From Distant Admirers to Library Lovers – and Beyond: A typology of public library engagement in America**

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The Pew Research Center's [Internet & American Life Project](#) has produced a series of reports presenting **new research on library services, trends in reading habits and patron needs in the digital age.**

*This brief, prepared by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, offers information highlights and potential messaging based on this research for you to customize and use in your community. Please feel free to use the information in this messaging brief as you see fit.*

**Key Messages:**

- **People value public libraries:** Nearly 70% of Americans regularly engage with public libraries and believe they play a positive role in their personal lives and community.
  - Regardless of personal library use, a majority of Americans across all demographics appreciate libraries for promoting literacy, improving the quality of life in their community, and giving everyone a chance to succeed.
- **There is a gap in access to information:** Two distinct social groups are emerging in the U.S. organized around how information is accessed, valued, and used—the information rich and the information poor.
  - People who engage regularly with their public libraries tend to be more embedded and active in their community and believe they can have a positive impact on others.
  - The information poor are less likely to feel like they have a voice in their community, are less connected socially, and have lower levels of technology use.
- **Information overload is not a problem:** Most Americans (82%) do not feel overloaded by the amount of information available today. Those that do feel overloaded tend to be lower users of technology, mobile devices, and less connected to their family and friends and community.
- **Technology is not replacing libraries' value:** Technology and personal devices are enhancing, rather than replacing, traditional institutions like libraries. Americans still count technology in the public library for access to information and learning.
  - It is critical that libraries keep pace with changes in technology to remain relevant and valuable to their communities.
- **Library use is linked to pivotal life events:** A person's life stage and personal circumstance impacts their library use and broader engagement with information.
  - Starting a family, attending school, or looking for work tends to increase library use.
  - Periods of job stability, moving, or retirement tend to decrease library use.
- **Libraries are easily accessible and welcoming:** Ease of access and personal experiences do not factor significantly in a person's level of library engagement. Despite the fact 54% of Americans visited a public library in 2012:
  - Over 90% of Americans know where their closest public library is located and three quarters say there is a public library within 5 miles of their home.
  - Among all library users, 94% say the library is welcoming and friendly.
  - 82% of all Americans say a library website would be easy for them to use.
- **Finding information is a social learning process:** How Americans seek information changes with advances in technology. Americans recognize they need social and expert support navigating information-intensive activities including applying for government benefits or learning how to operate a new social platform or mobile device.